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Reviews: Cinema

Thursday 29 May 2014

Venus in Fur (15)

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Dir: Roman Polanski

With: Mathieu Amalric, Emmanuelle Seigner

Runtime: 96 minutes

THE battle of the sexes moves on to an oh-so-French front in this sly and gleeful two-hander directed by Roman Polanski.

Mathieu Amalric is the play-wright struggling with how to bring his masterwork about sado-masochism to the waiting masses.

When Vanda (Emmanuelle Seigner) arrives late for her audition, he cannot believe this ditz blonde could ever grasp the complexity of his work.

Adapted from the play by David Ives, Venus in Fur makes a virtue of its staginess, allowing the two actors to go at it verbal hammer and tongs with nothing in the way of distractions.

That they manage to hold the attention for so long is tribute to the sheer classiness of the performances.

It would be easier to take the argument about female empowerment more seriously, however, if Seigner didn't spend most of the movie in her skimpies.

Cameo, Edinburgh, from May 30; Glasgow Film Theatre, June 13-16

Maleficent (3D) (PG)

Dir: Robert Stromberg

With: Angelina Jolie, Elle Fanning

EVEN by the high standards of Disney villainesses, the fairy who sent Sleeping Beauty to her fate has to be near the top of the tree for pure evil.

In this live-action picture, Disney takes the story of Sleeping Beauty right back to the start to find out just what made Maleficent so compellingly malevolent.

A perfectly-cast Angelina Jolie, complete with horns and cheekbones that could cut diamonds, plays the fearsome lady who spoils a good christening with her curses.

Elle Fanning co-stars as Aurora, the baby she puts a hex on - to fall into everlasting sleep when she turns 16 - but who in fact turns out to be a forceful character in her own right.

Director Robert Stromberg has won two Oscars for art direction (Avatar, Alice in Wonderland), so the piece certainly looks magnificent.

The pace is frustratingly sluggish to start with, though, leaving Jolie and Fanning to give the tale its oomph with their sparring.

A nicely old-fashioned fairy tale, nevertheless.

Jimmy's Hall (12A)

Dir: Ken Loach

With: Andrew Scott, Barry Ward

Runtime: 109 minutes

JUST off the plane from Cannes comes Ken Loach's latest drama. This one deals with the true tale of Jimmy Galton, a young firebrand who dared to take on church and state in depression era Ireland by opening a hall where local folk could dance, learn, sing, and otherwise better themselves or just have some fun. Barry Ward does a fine job of playing the socialist taking on the establishment, and Loach captures the era's oppressive atmosphere convincingly. That said, Jimmy's Hall is rather a muesli viewing experience. While it is probably good for a body in a general sort of way, and there are some moreish nuggets, it is hard work to chomp through.

Looking for Light: Jane Bown (CTBC)

Dirs: Luke Dodd, Michael Whyte

Runtime: 90 minutes

THIS gentle but probing look at the life, times, and work of the Observer photographer Jane Bown is a must-see for any admirer of the artform. Like Bown's black and white studies over the years it is an exercise in pared down simplicity. Bown is fascinating as she describes how she manages to get the best out of subjects ranging from Samuel Beckett and Tom Hanks to Bjork and the Queen, while all the while staying quietly in the background.

Glasgow Film Theatre, June 3-4; Cameo, Edinburgh, from June 6; Filmhouse, June 9-16

Musicwood (N/C 12+)

Dir: Maxine Trump

Runtime: 80 minutes

SHOWING as part of the UK Green Film Festival is Maxine Trump's impressive documentary about a fight to preserve the Alaskan rainforest. The starting point is guitars, made from precious woods such as Sitka spruce. Greenpeace brings together the guitar makers and the Native American owners of the land in the hope that a way can be found to preserve the forest. Trump does well to stick with a complex battle.

Glasgow Film Theatre, June 4, 6.15pm

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